

LEVEL 1 - 2 OF 8 STORIES

PAGE 3

The Associated Press

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House investigators say they are not satisfied that mere curiosity is the reason a CIA agent removed autopsy photographs of John F. Kennedy from a congressional safe.

But they don't know what the reason might have been and probably will never find out, Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, chairman of the House assassinations committee, told the House Thursday night.

However, Stokes said a committee investigation concluded that the CIA did not direct the agent to rifle the committee's safe.

The agent, since fired, has been quoted as saying his only reason for looking at the photograph was personal curiosity.

"The committee staff members are not satisfied that the motive has been established," Stokes told the House. "They believe mere curiosity is not consistent with the fingerprint evidence."

The CIA said its own investigation concluded the reason was mere curiosity.

But Stokes said the agent's fingerprints were found on the inside of the safe door, indicating it was pulled open, and on a plastic cover in a notebook from which the photograph was ripped out.

Stokes said the agent denied getting into the safe in an initial interview and in a second interview "did not admit any wrongdoing." He said the agent refused any further interview.

"In the absence of a full and truthful confession by the agency employee or the others, if any, who were in league with him -- or substantial new evidence -- all recognize that the matter of motive cannot be ultimately resolved," Stokes said.

Stokes said he considers the matter closed but would assist any further House investigation. There are reports the House Intelligence Committee is investigating the incident.

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Stokes' report to the House confirmed stories by Washington Post reporter George Lardner Jr. disclosing the incident, which occurred last July.

The reporter identified the agent as Regis T. Blahut. The CIA subsequently confirmed the agent's name and said he was fired as a result of the incident.

Lardner reported asking Blahut why he would not discuss the case with him and receiving this reply: "There's other things that are involved that are detrimental to other things."

The reporter said the agent refused to elaborate on what he meant by that.

Stokes told the House the agent was guarding CIA material in the committee's offices at the time of the incident. Stokes said the agent, left alone by a committee employee, had to open a closed, but unlocked door to an adjoining room to gain access to the autopsy photograph.

The committee employee, an artist making medical drawings of Kennedy's wounds, returned that afternoon to find the photograph and the notebook that had contained it outside the safe.

Stokes said the autopsy photographs were kept in a separate safe and there were special procedures for access to it to prevent the pictures from ever becoming public.

Stokes told the House there is no evidence that the photograph was taken away from the committee's office or misused or that anyone has profited from it.

The committee has concluded that Kennedy's assassination Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas probably resulted from a conspiracy involving two gunmen.

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